

Media and Sexual Assaults on Students in Nigerian Universities: An Overview

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Abstract

The issue of sexual assaults mostly on female students and male lecturers in most Nigerian Universities has generated great concern among scholars and members of the society. This study examines the extent to which staff and students define and understand sexual assault in most Nigerian Universities. The paper explores the role played by the media in reporting and preventing sexual assault in most of Nigerian Universities where issues of sexual assaults are being reported and investigated. The paper investigates incidents of rape in Nigerian Universities, looks at the effects of sexual assault on victims and analyzes the role of the media in preventing sexual assault among students and staff of Nigerian Universities. The study employs the Social Responsibility Theory of the press to analyze the role of the press in curbing issues of sexual assault on campuses of Nigerian Universities. The study concludes that sexual assault, especially on female students in Nigerian Universities has positioned the media on the wheels of investigative journalism. The paper recommends that media professionals should intensify their social responsibility role, especially, investigative journalism in order to eradicate sexual assault on female students in the campuses of Nigeria Universities.

Key words: Assault; Media; Sexual; Students; Universities

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INTRODUCTION

Social vices called sexual assault is rampant in tertiary institutions of learning like Universities in Nigeria. As observed by Geidam et al (2010) that in every human society where there is interaction between opposite sex, some levels of sexual attraction is expected. When this occurs, mutual interest and reciprocal response defines a civilized and socially acceptable sexual behavior.

Universities are established to make provision for conducive and desirable learning and working environments where students and lecturers can pursue their studies. The university or academic environment is meant to provide quality examples in eliminating inequalities and anomalies among the entire segments of the academia. The irony of the issue at hand is a different picture in our Nigerian Universities to that of sexual assault which has become a serious menace among students in various university campuses in Nigeria.

The conventional media; radio, television, newspaper, magazine are powerful tools in information dissemination on societal events that are pertinent to the people. Nacos (1994), in Ndolo et al (2011, p.33) posits that, the mass media is the provision of information which allows the media to act as the eyes and ears of the society. The mass media in any given society, form parts of the basic working social institutions for development and advancement of the society by providing information to the public. Supporting this statement, Arda (2012), believes that, the more attention a media outlet pays to a certain phenomenon, the more importance the public attributes to such an issue.

Sexual assault is any sexual act performed by one person on another without the persons consent and it includes genital, oral or anal penetration by a part of the accused body or by an object. Van Dechemy et al (2007). The victim might be threatening through the use of force. Sexual assault has been described based on personal relationship as marital, acquaintance, incest and date

rape, or legally in terms of age, as statutory rape and child sexual abuse. It is a serious violent crime that has no place in any ideal society and no one can justify its prevalence in any community that believes on mutual trust, especially, our Tertiary Institutions. Casteen (2007).

Nseyen (2018) recently reported the sacking of Professor Richard Akindeke by Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife for demanding sex from Monica Osagie a post graduate student to upgrade her mark. It is very disheartening to find this type of situation in an environment that is structured to mold good character towards sound leadership. Badejoko, Anyabolu (2014) observed that, sexual assault is a pandemic crime that is characteristically underreported, especially in the low income countries, because of the enduring culture of male dominance, female social and economic disempowerment and poor or non-prosecution of sex offenders (Badejoko, Anyabolu, Badejoko, Ijarotimi, Kuti & Adejuyigbe, 2014; Akinade, Adewuyi & Suleiman, 2005).

1. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To examine the extent to which staff and students define and understood sexual assault in the Nigerian Universities.
 - To examine the role played by the media in reporting and preventing sexual assault in Nigeria Universities.
 - To critically analyze the divergence views in relation to sexual assault in the Nigerian Universities.
 - To examine the institutional measures taken to avoid or curb sexual assaults.

2. MEDIA AND INVESTIGATIVE REPORT OF SEXUAL ASSAULT ON THE CAMPUSES OF NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES

Investigative Journalism is a form of journalism in which reporters go in-depth to investigate a single story that will uncover corruption, review government policies or of corporate houses, or draw attention to social, economic, political or cultural trends. An investigative journalist or journalists may spend months or years researching a single topic. The practice aims at exposing public matters that are otherwise concealed either deliberately or accidentally.

The roles of investigative journalism is that of teaching, manipulating, sensitizing and mobilizing line with the agenda setting theory of creating in the minds of the people or public, issues that are viewed as priority Nwabueze, (2005).

Investigative journalism plays a crucial role in bringing allegations of sexual assault in Nigerian Universities, against female students. Besides, investigative reports show how individual wrongs are part of a larger pattern of negligence or abuse and the systems that make these possible UNESCO (2007).

UNESCO (2013) stated that, investigative journalism involves exposing to the public matters that are concealed,

either deliberately by someone in a position of power, or accidentally, behind a chaotic mass of facts and circumstances that obscure understanding. It requires using both secret and open sources and documents. Armo (2000) described investigative journalism as the literature of exposure. Burgh (2000) also views investigative journalists as a profession of man or woman who are out to discover the truth and to identify lapses from such investigation. Kaplan (2013), states that, investigative journalism involves the use of public records and computer-assisted reporting, and a focus on social justice and accountability.

Koplan (2013) observes that, the definition of investigative journalism is multifaceted. He further buttress his claim by saying that, investigative journalism can also be known as, expose journalism adversarial journalism, in-depth journalism, advocacy journalism, public service journalism, watchdog journalism and journalism of outrage. He further posits that, some journalists claim that, all reporting is investigative reporting. There is some sense of truth in this statement, because investigative techniques are used widely by beat journalists on deadline as well as by “Iteam” members with weeks to work on a story. Nevertheless, investigative journalism covers a wider space, it is a set of methodologies that are a craft, and it can take years to master the practice. Investigative journalism deals with high standard research based on professionalism through in-depth investigation. Investigative journalism serves as the minor through which the public have a comprehensive view of activities of the university administrators, help set the agenda for the activities of the administrators, setting a platform for participation of the event of the administrators. For universities to curb or control sexual assault, it needs investigative journalism to enlighten the matters, shape their opinion and create a favourable disposition from members of the public Koplan (2013).

Weinberg (1996), defined investigative journalism as reporting through one’s own initiative and work product, matters of importance to readers, viewers or listeners. In one of the investigative reporting of sexual assault of the female students in the university campus in Nigeria, it was observed that, academically weak female students are more vulnerable than academically brilliant female students. The investigation concluded that, the weak students who are academically handicapped go after marks upgrade, as a result, they become prey in the hands of their predators (Lecturers or male students). Most of the sexual assault in the campus of Nigeria universities are committed by “cult members,” who believed they are supreme in the campuses and highly connected as the case may be they are untouchable Kyoan (2013).

In the campus, female victims are coerced into sex through threats to their life with the perpetrators brandishing knives or guns. An example was cited in one of the university campuses in Nigeria, where a male student believed to be a ‘cultist’ took the female student

out on a date instead of driving to the venue of the film show, the male student headed to a secluded part of the university campus, drew out a gun, sexually assaulted her and threatened to kill her if she dared report to the school or university authority. The victim reported the incident to the Students Affairs Office; the culprit had his studentship terminated by the institution Adejuyigbe (2014).

2.1 The Role of the Media in Preventing Sexual Assault

The media play major role in sensitizing, informing and educating the public on issues such as sexual assault in institutions of high learning in Nigeria, especially universities as the apex academic environment. It is a platform for the education and enlightenment of the public on news worthy issues. The Executive Director of Integrated Anti-Human Trafficking and Community Development Initiative (INTACOM Africa), posits that, the increase in sexual assault in Nigeria calls for media advocacy as communication and massive awareness are key tools in eliminating the scourge (The Guardian, 2015).

Conceptualizing sexual assault Adeleke, Olowookene, Hassan, Kommolafe, and Asekun-Olarinmoye (2012) noted that, sexual assault encompasses a wide range of activities ranging from rape to physically case intrusive sexual contacts, whether attempted or completed. It involves lack of consent; the use of physical force, coercion, deception or threat; or the involvement of a victim that is asked, unconscious, under aged, mentally incapacitated or physically impaired as a result of voluntary or involuntary alcohol or drug consumption.

The effect of assault on victims are; severe to the extent that they may lead to the lack of concentration on academic activities, truancy, unwanted pregnancy, decreased functionality and participation in group activities, this scenario might make the future of the victim looks grim, ominous and unsafe (Nseyen, 2018). The random observation give attention to higher prevalence of sexual assault in our higher institutions of learning where most cases of sexual assault are under reported by the victim for fear of stigmatization and rejection among university students. Besides, female students are mostly blamed for the act, while the culprits are usually left unpunished Kyoon (2013).

Akhiwu, Umanah, & Olueddo (2013) observed that, only 2 of 40 cases of sexual assault are reported, attributing this amongst other reason, especially, the legal angle required proving the cases and the associated stigma.

Mercy Dahlberg & Zwi (2002) observed that, sexual violence acts includes:

- Putting a penis, object as other acts of the body into someone's mouth, anus or vagina.
- Being forced to give or receive oral sex, putting a penis into someone's mouth.
- Being forced to masturbate or forced to watch someone masturbate.

- Unwanted sexual touching on private parts of the body.

- Sexual harassment, making inappropriate sexual comments.

- Voyeurism, someone exposes themselves to you.

- Making someone watch a sexual act or pornography.

Common factors believed to create the platform for sexual assault in our Nigerian Universities, particularly, among female students are: Indecent dressing by the female students who reluctantly display sexual body parts (like breast, navel and buttocks) through tight and transparent wears, popularly referred to as sexual flashpoints. Elegbeleye (2006).

According to World Health Organization reports (2018), believed that, one in every five women is a victim of sexual assault and globally, 35% of women have experience either physical or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence. For example, the case of University of Maiduguri; where female students wear sexually assaulted, constitutes 13.8% and 15% among young female students in University of Ibadan. Akinlusi, et al (2013).

In a study of hospital emergency room treatment for rape, Balogun, Ahmed, Iyekolo & Akinsuli, Ayorinde (2013), stated that, the male victims as a group sustained more physical trauma, and were more likely to have been held captive longer. Ironically, the affected victims find it difficult to report the type of assault is viewed (eg. Political, legal, clinical or scientific), Adejuyigbe (2014) observed that, sexual assault is a pandemic crime that is characteristically underreported, more especially in the low income countries, because of the enduring culture of male dominance, female social and economic disempowerment and poor or non-prosecution of sex offenders (Badejoko, Anyabolu, Badejoko, Ijarotimi, Kutie Adejuyigbe, 2014; Akinade, Adewuyi & Suleiman, 2010).

According to Ado, Anthonia and Babagana (2010), sexual assault may include rape, forced vaginal, anal or oral penetration, forced sexual intercourse, inappropriate touching, forced kissing, child sexual abuse or the torture of the victim in a sexual manner. They argued that, most of the victims who fall within this scenario or situation are women, that is, it is gender based issue and violent crime against both the individual and the society. They further said that, an estimated 300,000 women are raped and 3.7million are confronted with unwanted sexual activity annually.

The news media are called on to report sexual assault in their coverage. The media coverage of crimes, including sexual assault, has an impact on the knowledge, beliefs, attitudes and behaviours of the public regarding this phenomenon. Thakker, J. 2006). According to expert, the prevention of violence and sexual assault requires taking action regarding social norms, and the media have a part to play in shaping these norms. Also, information

that is published or broadcast constitutes one of the major channels of influence on social norms regarding sexual assault. Everland (2012). According to the World Health Organization, WHO (2013) initiatives, focused on transforming social norms supportive of sexual violence are a vital component of strategies aimed at preventing this type of violence.

2.2 Impact of the Media on the Shaping of Social Norms Concerning Sexual Assault

Social norms refer to the rules and expected behaviours occurring within a social group. Social norms define what is acceptable or unacceptable concerning a given phenomenon, such as sexual assault, norms influence society's perception of the phenomenon as well as the way society responds to its WHO (2013). Based on this perspective, social norms supportive of sexual assault and gender inequality, along with a society's acceptance of myths and biases, surrounding sexual assault, constitute social conditions that are conducive to sexual assault WHO (2013).

2.3 Reporting the Facts

The media are the main information source concerning crime and sexual assault for the general public. The media can help create much understanding of what sexual assault is and why it is unacceptable, through wide range of coverage of events related to sexual assault Dowler, et al (2010). The media is faced with the challenge of myth and reality in the area of sexual assault, based on this, the media have no option than to give adequate information and vivid education on the issue of sexual assault, not only that, it should be able to convey information that is objective and free of prejudice Renaud et al (2012).

Sexual assault is a complex sensitive problem, and covering it in the media entails a number of issues. For example, it may be difficult to differentiate between various sexual offences or to make sense at all the available statistics. Besides, presenting feature articles on the underlying causes as well as the individual and social consequences of sexual assault, the media can help the public to gain a better grasp of the problem. Media presentation on the issue of sexual assault will help the public perceive the matter as a social problem rather than being a pure private issue Dowler et al (2010). In assisting and protecting the victims of sexual assault, the media prompt assault victims, that is, those who have or who fear having sexually aggressive behavior, to seek for help in the appropriate quarters of experts in charge of such problem. Also in stressing the issue of seeking help by victims, the media break down the myth that sexual assault is an individual problem that should be managed solely by the people concerned; the victims, their family, and friends, and the perpetrators. The media can also contribute in reducing the perceptions among victims and perpetrators of being alone and unable to find help Dowler et al, (2010).

3. INCIDENTS OF RAPE IN NIGERIA: AN OVERVIEW

The role of rape or sexual assault in Nigeria today, is quite alarming. Statistics have it that in Lagos alone, 678 cases of rape were reported in 2012 which is an average of two cases per day more than 100 cases of rape were recorded in Kano courts in 2013, where only 40 offenders were convicted. In Anambra State, some NGOs working on sexual violence, recorded 115 incidents on rape, but only 12 cases were reported to the Police, but none of the incidents was successfully prosecuted (Guardian Newspaper, Friday February 7th, 2015, page 20). Another recent ugly scenario was the rape case of a 60 year old mother at the Ajabamidele Area of Ado Ekiti by her own 21 year old son, Akintunde Omotehinde. Oduah (2014, p10) gives the following as factors that bring about increased cases of rape in Nigeria; gaps in the country's laws and stringent burden of proof placed on victims and prosecutors; stigmatization unnecessary delays in the judicial system; conception in the judiciary; family ties (where cases of child rape and/or rape are committed against victims by their close relatives following which the family members more often than not decide not to report these crimes to the Police for prosecution owing to consanguinity of family ties).

Ado et al (2010, p.53) reports the situation satirically thus; rape culprits are having a field day, because the onus of proof lies only with the victims. The victim is the one that must provide the bed sheet used to rape her; she must provide her pant and not wash herself before going to the Police Station and the hospital even when it is sure that there could be delay in getting and presenting the report of medical tests because of the nature of our health facilities.

Approximately 620,000 women 18 years and older were forcefully raped in 2010. This number is an underestimated of the total number of females sexually assaulted and raped each year. More so, two-thirds of sexual assaults occur under the cover of darkness. Most of the sexual assault occur in the residence of the victim, the assailant or other individuals; other prevalent locations are street, commercial building and inside a school building or property (Guardian Newspaper Friday, 7th 2015, p.20).

3.1 Effect of Sexual Assault on Victims

The effect of sexual assault on victims can be devastating; it leaves an indelible mark in most cases. It can have a psychological, emotional, and physical effect on a victim. These effects are not easy to contain with by the victims who suffered sexual assault but with the right help and from referral centers and hospitals, the situation can be handled to some certain level. The Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network (RAINN, 2019), outlined some effects of sexual assault on the victim, viz:

Post – Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD): This is normal human reaction to an extreme or abnormal

situation. Every individual has a different way of reacting to situation if confronted with such devastating act (Sexual Assault). PTSD involves prolonged feelings of anxiety, or fear, intense horror, experiencing distressing memories of the events, sleep difficulties and so on. According to Geidam et al (2010), 35.6% of the 206 cases of sexual assault among female students in the University of Maiduguri, sustained extra – genital trauma, while others had psychological (24.9%) and genital trauma (15.6%).

Flashbacks: This occurs when memories of past traumas feel as if they are taking place in the current moment. These memories can come in various forms such as dreams, hallucinations, and overwhelming emotions. This re-experience always seem to appear from nowhere and blurs the line between the present and past of the victim, making the victim experience anxious, and fear. Flashbacks could be mild and brief, and sometimes, it could last longer at other times.

Depression: This form of effect can be difficult to recognize when it occurs, since its symptoms can be attributed to the other forms of effect. It occurs when the normal feeling of sadness last longer than two weeks. It involves prolonged sadness, loss of energy or persist out fatigue, feeling of worthlessness or guilt, inability to concentrate, worry, anger, thoughts of death or suicide amongst others. it is not a sign of weakness and can affect anybody. Other effects of sexual assault are self-harm, sexual transmitted infections, substance abuse, eating disorders, sleep disorder, pregnancy and suicide.

3.2 Theoretical Framework

This research is anchored on the social responsibility obligations and responsibilities which they owe the society in order that such a society would develop in the process of the media freely doing their duties. Expanded by Peterson Siebert & Schramm in 1956, the social responsibility theory is an extension of the libertarian theory in that the media recognize that, they have a responsibility to the society to carry out their essential functions Hassan (2013, p.170). Affirming this, (Uwakwe, 2012, p.94) asserts that, “The theory as a legal extension of the plus implies all vestiges of social responsibility.

Agbanu (2013, p.161-162) says concerning the emergence of the social responsibility theory of the media thus; Because of the need for regulation which arises due to the abuse of libertarian theory, the American Commission to study the situation and offer recommendation. This commission in after its assignment suggested that freedom has to go out, responsibility. This recommendation gave rise to the social responsibility theory, the social responsibility theory highlights the obligation and responsibilities the media owe the society.

The relevance of social responsibility theory to this study is that of bringing to the public, cases of sexual assault in the campuses of Nigerian Universities especially, on female students who are vulnerable, with

a view to exposing those perpetrating the acts. This will aid in sanitizing the issue of sexual assault among universities students in Nigeria and creating a conducive learning environment for all students. The lack of proper investigation and reporter on the issue of sexual assault on campuses of Nigeria Universities by the media will be seen as an indictment against the media for non performance.

CONCLUSION

The role of the media is not farfetched from the social responsibility role of information dissemination on thematic issues or events in the society. The sexual assault activities in campuses of Nigerian Universities are quite alarming and increasingly unimaginable. Sexual assault, especially on female students in Nigerian Universities has positioned the media on the wheels of investigative journalism in order to unveil the ugly scenario that has succeeded in polluting the academic environment to the total breakdown of law and order among students.

This paper is very timely in the establishment of the professional role of the media in curbing the escalating sexual assaults in the campuses of Nigerian Universities. Also recommendations are presented in order to proffer lasting solutions to the menace in Nigerian Universities in regards to sexual assault especially among female students who are always victims to the social vices.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Media professionals should intensify their social responsibility role, especially, investigative journalism in order to eradicate sexual assault, on female students in the campuses of Nigeria Universities.
 - University authorities should synergies with government through constituted security agencies in order to eradicate sexual assault among students in campuses of Nigerian Universities.
 - Nigerian Universities should organized seminars and symposiums on decent dress code among students in order to curb or eradicate sexual assault.
 - There is a need for a high level of advocacy in the coverage of sexual assault cases in Nigeria by the media.
 - There should also be more coverage in the area of counseling the victims of sexual assault. It's significant, because a lot of victims battle with the trauma of their experience, and unable to tell anyone or get direct counseling because of the fear of stigmatization.

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